113
175
64
86
88

Ethiopia MP1

[For information on Ethiopia, particularly in the fields of history, socialization and politics, see 11:Levine, MP5 Amhara, category 116.]

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

4

The Emerging Adolescent

While it is clear, as we have argued thus far, that a modernizing society stands to benefit from retaining or redefining many aspects of its traditional culture, it is also clear that in certain areas discontinuity is indispensable if significant change is to be brought about. Just what these areas are is something which presumably varies from nation to nation, though cross-cultural regularities may perhaps be uncovered in the course of further research. In the case of Ethiopia's incipient modernization, at least two subsystems of the traditional social system of the ruling Amhara have already undergone some sort of structural change: that of "secondary socialization," the complex of processes whereby skills and values necessary for adult life are imparted to adolescents; and that of the stratification system—the complex of arrangements whereby status is allocated to members of a society in accord with the various values upheld by the society.

An important precondition for the changes which have taken place in both of these areas was the establishment of a permanent capital: Addis Ababa, founded by Menelik in 1887[1] and now home for nearly half a million Ethiopians. Menelik's institution of the first government school in Addis Ababa in 1908 marked the beginning of a slow but steady process of introducing some of Ethiopia's youth to the novel skills and norms of modern Western culture. The concentration of power in Addis Ababa through the reign of Haile Selassie has diminished the status of the traditional Amhara elites and brought

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

tian rules as breaking the fasts. By adjusting to the adult fasting schedule and submitting to the moral authority of the soul-father the young person's membership in the Amhara religious community is being solidly established. With the advent of full adulthood, around the age of thirty, the Amhara is ready to observe the most severe fast of all, the forty-eight-hour period of total abstinence before Easter.

Forms of obedience and respect comprise the principal fiber of the Amhara social fabric, as we shall see more clearly in chapter vii. They are perhaps the most fundamental lessons of Amhara socialization. As soon as the child is capable of understanding he is made aware that all individuals older than he is, and all those in higher social positions, must be shown the most fastidious deference. Not to do so is a sign of being *bälağ*[8] ("rude"), a trait which is corrected by harsh physical punishment. The readiness to respect superiors appears as early as in children's play groups, where the oldest boy spontaneously dictates the activities of the group and receives unquestioning obedience from the others.

For girls after ten and boys after twelve the training for obedience and respect is stepped up as they come under a more constant regimen of control by their parents and other elders. They are ordered to do a considerable amount of work for the household and are expected to be at the beck and call of any individual of higher status who tells them to do something. Thus they become conditioned to show automatic subservience to any figure of authority in later life, be it the family patriarch, community elder, priest, or political official.

His family of orientation is thus the primary agent for transmitting to the Amhara adolescent the more general societal norms as well as for readying him for his adult roles. In order to secure continuity of the Abyssinian social system from generation to generation, specific mechanisms outside the family, such as puberty rites or adolescent age groups, have not been required to mediate the transition to adulthood.

Personal Identity and Variant Patterns[8]

The most important single determinant of the personality of an Amhara appears to be his identification with the parent or parent-figure of the same sex. "Like father, like son" is both ideology and reality in Abyssinia. The attainment of ego identity is therefore normally a matter of imitation rather than discovery or invention. It represents an unfolding of dispositions that have been long internalized and steadily nursed by the consistent regards of an approving milieu.

Assuming the appropriate psychosexual identity is, it appears, hardly ever problematic. Although members of the same sex typically kiss upon greeting,

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

New Agents of Socialization

In Amhara society, as we have seen, the agents of primary socialization—parents and older relatives—likewise prepare the young person for adulthood, by teaching him work skills, arranging his marriage, and conditioning him to the mores of adult society. In changing Ethiopia, these traditional managers of adolescence are unable to impart the skills and values needed for a modern life. Their role as agents of secondary socialization is taken for the most part by teachers and peers in the government schools.

Schools at the post-elementary levels in Ethiopia have been staffed mainly by teachers brought under contract from foreign countries—chiefly Canada, England, India, Sweden, and the United States. Together with a growing number of Ethiopians who have studied abroad, and some graduates of Ethiopian colleges, these teachers have been the principal medium through which Ethiopian adolescents have been exposed to Western culture, not only by teaching subjects like science and English literature, and skills like drafting and stenography, but also by imparting attitudes and values important for Ethiopia's modernization.

High among these new values is that of rewarding an individual solely on the basis of performance. Although the long arm of "connections" has occasionally reached into the school system, to save, for example, the relative of some dignitary from dismissal despite substandard performance, the day-to-day operation of school life follows general standards which are applied without regard to family connections, class position, or tribal and religious affiliations.* The degree to which the students have accepted the sovereignty of universal norms is reflected in their response to the question: "In general, what will help you most to get ahead, ability or 'pull' (that is, personal contacts or influence, through family or friends)?" Nine-tenths of the students at both secondary and college levels expressed the belief that ability would help them more to get ahead.

Another modern value promoted by the school staffs is that of Ethiopian nationalism. In the elementary schools outside of Addis Ababa, pupils tend to associate chiefly with members of their own tribe and religion. In the post-elementary schools, they inevitably have considerable intercourse with members of other groups. On the basis of our sample, the ethnic composition of the post-elementary schools may be estimated as in Table 2. This ethnic pluralism would seem at first to intensify particularistic sentiments among

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 115]

* This reflects deliberate government policy. Before the occupation, sons of noblemen were segregated at Tafari Makonnen School and received preferential treatment. After the liberation, the Emperor not only discontinued this policy but took pains to eliminate favoritism in the schools to a large degree.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

565 554 The local nobility, on the other hand, were eminences whose lives and reputations were bound to a more circumscribed locale. While the non-royal nobility, or *makuánnent* in the stricter sense, performed as high dignitaries at the imperial court and governors of large provinces, the local nobility were district chiefs and judges, or even simply wealthy landowners, who enjoyed considerable deference. Though they might not be known outside of their home regions, these men were, for the mass of the population, the lords of existence. *Ka-Gondar negus / yägar ämbärä,* "the petty district chief [is obeyed] more than the Gondar king"[19] expresses folk wisdom on the subject. The Amharic terms which designate this class of men are *bälabbät* and *shum,* terms we shall want to consider more closely below.

565 184 Despite these distinctions among members of the upper stratum of Abyssinian society, with respect to their general orientation and style of life they differed only in degree. They created and shared what might be called a "gentry subculture," even though it was not so differentiated from the general culture as was the case in Europe and China. In the present context, it will be meaningful to treat them as a single status group.

565 184 86 [576] Special manners and skills were self-consciously taught to children of the *makuánnent,* most of which remain part of the gentry subculture today. An etiquette of instinctual inhibition is taught. Some attention is given, for example, to toilet training, which is spontaneous among peasant children. Spitting in public is proscribed. Physical aggression is discouraged in favor of the more subtle forms of satire and patient manipulation of others. A quiet, reserved manner of speaking is stressed, in contrast with the less inhibited and cruder self-expression of the peasantry. Dignity of comportment is expected at all times; a noble should not, for example, express great enthusiasm or surprise over anything. Sobriety is inculcated as a virtue; alcohol is *la-çhawä lïjj mädasetchä / la-bälagë mäzabäbatchä* ("for the nobleman's son a stimulant, for the commoner an intoxicant"). In short, the gentry subculture stresses the general ideal of bringing a child up to be conspicuously genteel, or *çhawä.*

[293]

565 184 868 [871] [534] [883] Sons of the nobility have traditionally followed a privileged curriculum.[20] They were given lessons in horseback riding and weaponry at an early age. They were also taught how to swim, an uncommon skill among the Abyssinians. Reading would often be taught, for which schooling a man of the church might be brought in as a tutor, or the boy might be sent for a while to a monastery. He might also learn how to play the *baganä,* the ten-stringed lyre used to accompany certain forms of religious and plaintive secular songs. Instead of spending his teen-age years at the plow, which was regarded as beneath his dignity, the noble boy would follow his father to court and observe the ways of litigation and the manner of passing judgments; or he might be sent as a page to the court of the king or some great lord.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

in the same half-interested manner in which the shepherd directs cattle by throwing stones.

The effect of Amhara socialization, then, is to inhibit rather than to stimulate the development of individuality. The spirited and expressive Amhara child of two or three is conditioned to become, for the rest of his childhood and to a large extent throughout life, taciturn, fearful, and slightly morose.

The traditional system of formal education is no less indifferent to the personality of the learner. The atmosphere of the schools where reading is taught is harsh and punitive. Pedagogy at all levels of instruction is based on repetition and memorization, with strict adherence to the conventions preferred by the teacher.* The traditional ban on the teaching of writing may also be related to the desire to keep the student's mind on received formulations. Amhara formal education in no wise seeks to cultivate the individual, but aims solely to prepare cultural specialists who will be able to perform the rituals and perpetuate the teachings of the Ethiopian Church. The instruction of noble children, finally, in the arts of riding, swimming, shooting, and playing the lyre has more to do with the transmission of the manners and skills appropriate to a position of high status than with a concern for personal development.

Music and Art

Music and dance are greatly enjoyed by the Amhara, but little attention is given to the cultivation of their forms or the refinement of their performance. The music is monodic, both melodically and rhythmically, and, except for some intricately structured accelerandos in certain religious hymns, consists chiefly in the indefinite repetition of a number of very limited musical ideas. Dance forms are still more limited and repetitive. In both genres, variation and the development of personal styles are not encouraged. Innovation, particularly in religious forms, is likely to meet strong resistance; witness the vigorous rejection of Alaqā Gabra Hānnā's innovations in dance by the masters at Gondar.

Like music and dance, Amhara design provides little scope for the free play of imagination. In pottery, basketry, and even in such antique ornamentation as appears on the coins and stelae of Aksum and the churches of Lalibela, the recurring style is that of the continuous repetition of simple geometric patterns. Painting provides a richer medium, but here again individuality is carefully constricted. The subject matter of pictures is limited by tradition to scenes concerning the life of Christ and the saints, and to the *res gestae* of emperors. The manner of treatment of these themes is

* A partial exception to this—the teaching of *qənə*—will be discussed below.